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# PROFESSOR MÜNSTERBERG'S CONCEPTION OF THE PROBLEM AND CONTENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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Books purporting to deal with psychology in its relation to teaching do more and more abound. That the science of mental facts should have some bearing on the methods of mental training and instruction many of us have felt more or less dimly, but the books which have presumed to tell what that bearing is have one by one been sadly laid aside with the feeling that they have failed.

The reasons for this failure are largely due to an inadequate comprehension of the real problems involved. On the one hand, eminent psychologists have written treatises for the teacher on the apparent assumption that *any* correct description of mental facts and mental processes would, perforce, be of interest and value to the teacher because he is primarily concerned with the training of minds. This type of psychology was usually of a very general character, revealing no attempt at adaptation to the teacher's problems. It was often reputable psychology, but the teacher usually felt that it had no more to do with his work than it did with that of any other profession. In its next stage of development, educational psychology consisted largely of excerpts from the general science which were supposed to have some actual bearing upon teaching. The facts thus presented were nearly always superficial and inadequate because they were too often selected and applied by persons with little or no training in psychology. At best, such works were scrappy, devoid of definite organization, and lacking in scientific point of view. Educational psychology so conceived was a sort of bastard child

<sup>1</sup> *Psychology and the Teacher*. By HUGO MÜNSTERBERG. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1909. Pp. xii+330. \$1.50 net.

of the real science of psychology, abhorred alike by the scientist, and by the serious teacher: by the former because it represented a shameless abuse of a reputable body of facts, and by the latter because it pretended to give bread and really offered only a stone.

In the last few years it has become increasingly manifest that psychology for the teacher, aside from the actual experimental investigation of school problems, must be written from some definite educational point of view furnishing the criterion for the selection and organization of whatever facts properly belong to this science. Such a work cannot be written by the teacher who is only an amateur in psychology. Neither can it be the work of the psychologist unacquainted with the needs and problems of the teacher. It should not be a piecemeal presentation of certain psychological superfluities but a serious scientific examination of the educational process with special reference to the psychological factors involved in it. The problem should be educational, and the organizing interests should be educational, but the facts chiefly considered should be psychological. It will be the point of view and the interest that lie back of the facts that will render the treatment something more than a rehash of general psychology.

In view of these things, we turn with interest to the recent book by Professor Münsterberg, *Psychology and the Teacher*. Certainly, as far as psychological facts are concerned, we may presume that the material presented is authoritative. We cannot help wondering, however, whether the philosopher and psychologist with his highly specialized interests can have had a sufficiently close acquaintance with the problems of elementary- and high-school teachers to be able to offer such teachers the definite help they need. To judge from the plan of the work, it seems that our author recognizes the necessity of a general organizing point of view that the subject-matter may have unity and definiteness. This point of view, he frankly holds, is an ethical one. We must, he says, first of all have an adequate conception of the educational ideal as well as of the ideal of life in general before we can arrive at any conclusions regarding what psychological facts are of importance for the art of teaching.

The book consists of three main parts. The ethical aspects of education are first discussed as a basis for the selection of the strictly psychological material which forms the next division of the book, and last of all there is a section of ninety-three pages devoted to the practical problems of curriculum and school administration. This plan offers practical possibilities, but in the realization of them even the sympathetic critic might feel that Professor Münsterberg is disappointing. For instance, the psychological facts bear no clear evidence of having been selected in accordance with the ethical principles laid down in the beginning, nor do the applications in the third part seem to be related to any extent to the psychological section. Here and there in the presentation of the psychological material itself there are brief statements of application.

It is not, however, the psychological material that concerns us here so much as the general presuppositions of the work. With the author's introductory statements of the nature and scope of educational psychology we find ourselves in hearty accord. It is, he tells us, one of the branches of applied psychology, bearing the same relation to the pure science that engineering does to physics. Of these various branches of applied psychology one relates to law and another to medicine. Of a truth, as he says, these applications are more than "a mere heaping of such bits of theoretical psychology as could possibly be utilized for practical purposes." They consist rather in a "systematic studying and experimenting with mental facts from the point of view and in the interest of practical needs." They "deal exclusively with the question: How can psychology help us reach certain ends?" (p. 95). Educational psychology must not be a "cheap compromise." "It surely would not do to recommend the cramming of some psychological laws and then simply add an appendix of moral appeals, nor would it be better to warm over the old traditional phrases of educational ideals and stuff them with fragments of sociology and child-study. What is really needed is a really organic union of the aims and of means, a true synthesis." The present writer believes in the soundness of this contention. Psychology as applied to educa-

tion has too long been a mere appendage to the theoretical science with no very definite status of its own. Most teachers will agree with Professor Münsterberg that a great deal of the psychology that they have been called upon to study has contributed very little to their pedagogical efficiency. As he says,

The pile of interesting facts which the sciences heap up for the teacher's use grows larger and larger, but the teacher seems to stare at it with growing hopelessness. He blames himself and ever makes new efforts to master the facts, yet he cannot help feeling that they do not tell him what he ought to do. Perhaps he feels more erudite, but he does not feel wiser. . . . The mere study of the child's nature and of the pupil's biology has too often been followed by sad disappointment.

Again, educational psychology is not theoretical psychology nor is it something tacked on to psychology with no valid ground of its own. It is rather an independent discipline with its own problems and its own methods of procedure.

In view of this clear appreciation of the problems of educational psychology it is with special interest that we turn to the proffered solution. The root of the present difficulty is, according to Professor Münsterberg, a failure to distinguish between facts and values, a point which he discusses at considerable length and to which he repeatedly recurs in different parts of the book. As he evidently regards this distinction as fundamental to his conception of educational psychology, we need to pause a moment to examine it. Facts as such, he contends, do not have the attribute of value. Science, therefore, as a study of facts in their causal relation, cannot be directly useful to the teacher. What the teacher needs, first of all, is to have a clearly recognized goal, having which he may hope to utilize his knowledge of facts for its realization. The great difficulty with the present-day attitude is that the aim of education has been too largely sought in the statements of science regarding the facts of the world. This fundamental mistake, the author says, has led to much hasty and ill-advised action supposedly based upon science when science is really absolutely neutral. Psychology, for instance, may state the conditions of imitation, but ethics alone can tell *what* it is desirable to imitate. "About a scien-

tific fact we can only say that it exists." Nothing is good or bad for science.

And yet the teacher must have an aim. Where can he get it? Professor Münsterberg's answer is that he must look to ethics. The world of values is a creation of the will, and to that world belong our purposes and our ideals; it is a realm with which science has nothing to do. In fact the universe of human desire and purpose must be rigidly set over against the brute fact. Having made such a sharp separation between fact and value—a distinction which no one would be disposed to deny, although one might wonder if it does not have an exaggerated importance attributed to it—it is interesting to follow up the author to see just how he is going to get hold of his values. Fact seems to be given ready-made. But what of value? Where does that come from? It is not something such as pleasure, which may be immediately perceived. In fact, a tendency of many persons to state the ideal in terms of pleasure illustrates, according to the author, the frequency of this methodological fallacy of seeking goals in mere facts. Pleasure, for instance, is a fact of experience, but one is not warranted on that account in setting it up as the object and end of all endeavor.

We have no disposition here to question the assertion that there is a distinction between fact and value. It is important of course that with an unclouded mind we should see what *is*. Mere facts do not in themselves tell us what we should do with them. And even though these mere facts are fictions of science and imagination, it is quite conceivable that there may be many crises in the practical affairs of life when it will be advantageous for getting on with our particular task to assume this abstract and really artificial attitude toward the content of experience and, without any bias, ask the question, *What is it that is actually given?* whatever it may be that we *wish* it were in view of our present purposes. But even though it should be necessary to assume such an attitude, it should never blind us to the fact that facts are always intimately associated in their origin and in their continuance in attention with human desires and purposes. They were not given ready-made but were in every case built up in

the course of following out some active purpose or other. Fact and purpose are normally fused in experience, and it is only when we fail to obtain our purposes that we set up either one of them in its artificial abstraction. We are not contending that there is no distinction between fact and purpose, but rather that though they may be separated for methodological purposes they actually exist side by side in the most intimate functional relations, that facts do determine purposes, and that an inadequate view of the facts often results in one-sided ideas and even in the complete miscarrying of our purposes. Hence we raise the question as to whether the grave errors to which our author calls attention as the outcome of the failure to distinguish fact from value are not rather the result of an inadequate acquaintance with the facts themselves. At any rate facts are so intimately associated in their origin and development with purposes and values that any conspicuous defect in a person's ideals may fairly be explained on the ground that he has not taken a sufficiently broad or intensive view of the facts involved.

Take as an instance of the above point the author's illustration of the abuse that has crept into education under cover of the doctrine of interest. He asserts that the teacher has, upon the admitted psychological fact of interest, based the unwarranted judgment that *all* work must be *made* interesting to the pupil. While it is a recognized psychological fact that some things arouse the immediate interest of the child, this scientific fact is entirely neutral as to whether the interest is actually desirable or undesirable. When, therefore, the teacher says that interest is itself good and that all things should be made interesting he may imagine that he is still talking about scientific fact when in reality he has passed into the sphere of judgment. That interest should be the goal is not the scientific fact that he supposes, but a judgment the validity of which depends upon other considerations than science. As a general proposition all this is true enough, but we should contend that there is another real and perhaps more serious difficulty than this methodological one. It is this: the teacher has neglected not so much to note that the scientific fact of spontaneous interest is neutral as to exercise

due precaution in the formation of the judgment itself. This mistake would be possible for anyone who knew that fact and value are different, not merely for the one who imagined that facts pointed definitely to certain values. We will admit that there is something wrong with the judgment that every school task must make an immediate appeal to the pupil's interest; but what is the source of the error? The present writer maintains that it is due to an inadequate acquaintance with the neutral facts themselves. The mistaken judgment regarding interest is a conclusion, an induction, but a hasty one, and based upon an insufficient acquaintance with the facts. The teacher who says that all school work must be made interesting needs to know more about the facts of interest and their relation to mental processes generally. Partly upon the basis of this larger knowledge of the particular nature of interest and partly on the basis of his broader knowledge of life he will form a valid judgment of the place of interest in education.

This better acquaintance with the facts would include some such data as these: First, the fact that interest is not *mere* feeling, but feeling in connection with some sort of self-expressive activity; then the further scientific fact that that which arouses spontaneous interest involves an instinctive and relatively primitive organization of the self; the scientific facts also, that more and more complicated attitudes may be constructed in the process of experience and that the activity through which any one of those attitudes functions is accompanied by the mental condition of interest. There would be other facts to take account of, such as the exact interrelations of interest and effort. This is not equivalent to saying that the more complicated attitudes are any better than the simpler ones nor that the interest associated with them is any more desirable to cultivate. The judgment that the teacher makes on this point will depend upon his general philosophy of life. This, however, is our point: the general philosophy of life will be more apt to make an intelligent judgment upon the problem of interest in education if it is in possession of this broader view of the facts than if it takes the narrow view suggested in Professor Münsterberg's treatment. And

mark you, this better judgment will come, not because the judge realizes and sharply distinguishes between fact and value, but because he has more facts upon which to base his judgment. It will be a good thing for him to recognize the difference between fact and value, but a recognition of that difference may be accompanied by a very erroneous act of judgment. Certainly as far as this illustration is concerned the prime difficulty is scarcely where our author supposes that it is. At any rate it is hard to see that the confusion of fact and value is a "peril to the intellectual life of the time." Is not a common willingness to rest satisfied with something less than a full view of the whole system of facts in all their subtle interrelations an even graver peril to our intellectual life?

We should take similar exception to the author's other illustrations, as for example, the misuse of the Darwinian theory of natural selection of the fittest. That some such principle seems to prevail in the brute world has been taken by some to mean that it should also prevail in human society, and that it should be the standard according to which social activity should shape itself. This crude application of the Darwinian hypothesis, however, has been due not to a confusion of fact and value but to a defective induction, a hasty conclusion from a superficial examination of biological and social facts that the law, which seems to hold so completely in the sphere of biology, also holds in the sphere of society. The primary difficulty is that the *facts are not clearly known*. Social conditions are more complex than was realized at first and, consequently, it is more difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the facts. When they are better understood the evaluating consciousness can avoid the errors of judgment which it might otherwise make.

Our point, as over against the author, is not that value is contained in scientific fact but that the determination of value, the setting-up of ideals, is a process which cannot be absolutely divorced from experience of fact, that, while fact is *fact* and not *value*, in the *development* of value fact serves an important function. The same criticism is to be passed on Professor Münsterberg's contention that many one-sided reform movements are due

to picking out a few facts regarding a certain tendency and jumping to the conclusion that these facts require further movement in that direction. We may remark that this transcending of the present fact, this statement that it tends one way or another, is a legitimate phase of scientific investigation. But the scientist must be careful not to infer future changes upon the basis of a too hasty examination of the given data. We should say that the main difficulty with the one-sided reformer is that he does not know his facts well enough.

There is another serious difficulty which most of us continually meet with. It is that which grows out of our not knowing how to connect psychological fact with our needs and purposes. We feel sure that even our author would admit that such a connection must finally be made, even though he has in the beginning insisted that there is a great gulf between the two. Is it as important for educational psychology to emphasize this methodological distinction, as it is to help the teacher to put together that which he had thus far largely failed to connect or which he has possibly wrongly connected?

Up to this point we have confined our attention to Professor Münsterberg's contention that facts and values are different. With this general proposition few would be inclined to disagree, although many would feel that an undue importance has been assigned to the difference as far as educational psychology is concerned. However that may be, there is still the further problem as to the origin of these values. Facts our author seems to regard as more or less objective, as given ready-made. But whence are values? True, the teacher must have ideals; but where is he to get them? It does not help very much to think of them as the product of free acts of will. Truth, beauty, and goodness are the ideals of life, and they should therefore be the ideals of all true educational effort. These concepts of value are, we are told, constructions of the will upon the brute realities of science, but in no sense deduced from them. This is true enough, but how have we come to make these constructions? Our author surely does not mean to say that we have an innate sense of any of them. They are free acts of will, he holds, and

yet in some way the will gets a cue as to what they are as it observes the chaos of the physical world and the equally chaotic world of human striving. That is, in the midst of the endless flux and change of phenomena certain uniformities are to be noted.

We come to this conclusion with somewhat of a shock after having been reminded so many times of the ultimate difference between fact and value. How can that which is mere fact give even a cue to the determination of value? Is not uniformity *just uniformity*? And how can it ever generate the idea that it is valuable and that it should therefore be striven for? This objection is entirely aside from another and more specific one that might be raised: whether the appreciation of beauty, for instance, depends ultimately upon the intellectual recognition of unity in the midst of diversity. And a similar question may be raised regarding the recognition of the good. These points are merely suggested as problems that Professor Münsterberg's philosophy must face in any thorough examination. Let us rather at this juncture note his own description of the origin of value and of these values in particular.

How [he inquires] has this *worthless* [italics ours] chaos of haphazard experiences become the material of our complete satisfaction? Have all these values nothing in common? [We thought it was facts, not values, we were examining.] If we compare their structure can we find any one feature which characterizes all of them? Indeed such a feature is always present. . . . In every one of these cases we have grasped some bit of experience, have held it, have maintained it, and have found it the same in a new experience. Yes, we may make the sweeping statement: all of these values have in common the one factor that a certain element of experience asserts itself. It is maintained in the changing chaos. It did not come up to disappear, but it could be found again in a new state.

All of the connections of scientists, of historians, of mathematicians, or logicians "are only different ways of expressing just that sameness which we claimed for all valuable experiences" (p. 56). It is this recognition of identity in the midst of diversity that gives us our first conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness.

In fine, we should say that the upshot of the whole argu-

ment is trite and disappointing. We had expected to gain new insight into real problems, and we are rewarded by a purely formal, contentless statement to which each one would agree until the question of applying it appears, and then we recognize that we are no better off than before.

In two conspicuous ways, then, Professor Münsterberg's treatment of the ethical aspect of education is defective. In the first place, it insists upon the proposition that facts do not yield values, and then attempts to find value in a certain aspect of this very chaos of natural facts. And, by the way, we wonder whether it is so very necessary after all for educational psychology to concern itself with the philosophical problem of the origin of the ideal. It is far more important to find a good working conception of *what* ideals must be *real* ideals and how they can be brought into vital and dynamic contact with the concrete problems of teaching. In the second place, this theory is defective in that it offers a purely formal, contentless conception of the ideal; and this defect is to the writer's mind, far more serious than the first.

The psychological portion of the book has brief chapters upon the following subjects: "The Objections to Educational Psychology," "The Application of Psychology," "Mind and Brain," "The Biological Aspect," "Apperception," "Memory," "Association," "Attention," "Imitation and Suggestion," "Will and Habit," "Feeling," "Individual Differences." The mode of treating these subjects is closely allied to the special type of educational psychology referred to in the beginning of this article. That is to say, it is little more than the collection of excerpts from general psychology, apparently selected in part because they are suitable for having pedagogical application attached to them. But this is true only of a part of the material. For instance it would be hard to tell what particular significance the metaphysical theory of psychophysical parallelism has for the art of teaching; and many other illustrations might be given to the same effect. True, it may be well for the person who makes some pretense to culture to know about this theory; but that is altogether another matter and lies outside the province of edu-

cational psychology. On the whole one feels that this section is a rather uninspiring rehash of theoretical psychology, with the points selected according to no well-defined principle. One suspects, however, that the selection is based upon what Professor Münsterberg regards as those elementary facts of psychology with which the teacher just as a well-informed person should be acquainted. In so far as this idea controls the choice of material the work can hardly claim to be in any specific way an educational psychology. It is rather a piecemeal treatise on metaphysics and psychology for the general reader. In other words, notwithstanding the general interest of the work it bears no clear evidence of insight on the author's part into the real problem of psychology for the teacher.

It would be perhaps ungracious, in view of the statements of the preface, to refer to an apparent change in the author's point of view indicated by such a book as this. The suggestion is repeatedly offered that the psychological facts that have bearing upon teaching have largely appeared in the last decade under the stimulus of the author's suggestion, some ten years ago, that at that time psychology had as yet little or nothing to offer to the teacher. It is safe to say that the only positive teaching of those "much discussed essays" was that psychology does not and cannot affect the practical art of teaching. Certainly few persons got the idea from them that there is great need for the development of psychology along the line of educational problems. It is also safe to say that the remarkable development of the experimental study of educational problems in the last few years owes nothing to Professor Münsterberg unless it is the stimulus of contrary suggestion. At any rate there is little significant material presented in this book that can claim to be the distinctive fruitage of the last decade.

Into the last, the educational section, we do not have space to enter at this time. As we have before stated, it has no marked organic connection with the rest of the work. The suggestions are necessarily quite general, and though often interesting are more often commonplace. The last chapter on "The Teacher" is, however, a happy exception, and is well worth reading.